

King's Research Portal

Document Version

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication record in King's Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Fairey, T. H. J. (2018). Does the impact of participatory arts endure over time? Longitudinal research and strengthening the case for participatory arts and media. In I. Serti (Ed.), *Participatory Arts for Invisible Communities* (pp. 181-186). Omnimedia. http://paic-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/E-book_Paic.pdf

Citing this paper

Please note that where the full-text provided on King's Research Portal is the Author Accepted Manuscript or Post-Print version this may differ from the final Published version. If citing, it is advised that you check and use the publisher's definitive version for pagination, volume/issue, and date of publication details. And where the final published version is provided on the Research Portal, if citing you are again advised to check the publisher's website for any subsequent corrections.

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Research Portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognize and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Research Portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact librarypure@kcl.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Fairey, Tiffany. 2018.

‘Does the impact of participatory arts endure over time? Longitudinal research and strengthening the case for participatory arts and media.’

In *Participatory Arts for Invisible Communities: PAIC*; Irena Sertić (ed), p181-186. Zagreb, Croatia: Omnimedia

E-book available to download here:

http://paic-project.eu/wp-content/uploads/PARTICIPATORY_ART_e_book.pdf

DOES THE IMPACT OF PARTICIPATORY ARTS
ENDURE OVER TIME?
LONGITUDINAL RESEARCH AND STRENGTHENING THE
CASE FOR PARTICIPATORY ARTS AND MEDIA

Tiffany Fairey

Abstract

In a funding environment that prioritises short-term demonstrable results, the majority of participatory arts and media evaluation happens during and just after a project has taken place. There is little incentive to build a picture of the long-term impact of initiatives and a dearth of research that considers how the effects of participatory arts and media projects play out over time. Our failure to engage in longitudinal and follow up evaluation undermines the case for participatory arts and media and impedes critical learning around the contribution of participatory arts and media to social change processes.

This chapter discusses research into the long-term impact of Los Talleres de Fotografía Social (TAFOS), a pioneering social photography project that ran over 12 years (1986-98) during Peru's bloody internal conflict and involved over 270 photographers from community organisations, youth groups and trade unions all over the country. The findings of a research film, *These Photos Were My Life*, conducted with former TAFOS photographers reflecting on the significance of the project in their lives, 15-20 years after their initial involvement, demonstrates the enduring long-term impact that community led participatory arts and media projects can have on the critical consciousness of participants (Fairey 2015, 2017). Whilst impact assessment can be frustrating for practitioners it argues that evaluation, as an exercise in critical learning conducted over time, provides invaluable insight into the less tangible but significant contribution of participatory arts and media project on social change.

Keywords: participatory photography; participatory arts; evaluation; impact; longitudinal research

Does the impact of participatory arts endure over time?

While evaluation of participatory arts projects certifies to the 'empowering' and transformative self-developmental benefits projects can bring for participants (eg. Matarosso 1997, Reeves 2002, Jermyn 2004) commentators highlight various shortcomings in current research. These include a tendency to over-state the benefits; the failure of theoretical models and evaluation methods to adequately capture the impact of participatory arts; and the weak base of the existing evidence (Merli 2002, Belfiore 2002, Belfiore & Bennett 2007). In addition there is a dearth of research that identifies long term impact with most evaluation happening during or just after the activity has taken place (Belfiore 2002).

In a funding environment that prioritises short-term demonstrable results, there is little incentive to build a picture of the long-term impact of participatory arts. The failure to do so impedes the case for participatory arts. The lack of longitudinal research prevents the building of a robust and multi-layered picture of the contribution of participatory arts to social change processes. In a field dominated by short-term evaluations and snapshot project descriptions, there is a pressing need for longitudinal research that captures learning around the psychosocial, political and subjective impact of projects and how they play out over time.

Los Talleres de Fotografía Social (TAFOS) was a pioneering social photography project that ran over 12 years (1986-98) during Peru's bloody internal conflict and involved over 270 photographers from community

organisations, youth groups and trade unions all over the country¹ (TAFOS 2006). TAFOS sought to enable ordinary Peruvians struggling in the middle of violent internal conflict and economic hardship, to reclaim their image and worked closely within the grassroots popular movement arming people with cameras and disseminating their pictures nationally and internationally. My doctoral research sought to explore the long-term significance and relevance of the project for some of its participants, 15-20 years after their initial involvement.

I was interested in exploring whether the short term 'empowering' benefits, often a key part of the impact narrative around participatory endeavours endured. Had the experience been valuable? If it had how was it still important? If it was not, why not? Existing evaluation models into community empowerment seek to establish a direct relationship between the participatory experience and evidence of 'getting to action' or how people became agents of change as a result of the intervention (Catalani & Minkler 2010). What evidence of 'action' would I find in people's stories?

The findings were captured in a non-linear research film, *These Photos Were My Life* (Fairey 2015b)², and attest to the enduring impact that community led participatory photography and media projects can have on participants (Fairey 2015, 2017). What emerged

¹ TAFOS website:

http://facultad.pucp.edu.pe/comunicaciones/tafos/about_us.htm

² *These Photos Were My Life* is available to view online: <http://these-photos.korsakow.tv/>

was a plural picture of how impact plays out over time and what impact looks like. There are the more obvious cases of people who gained skills that translated directly into careers and employment opportunities; those who became photographers or who worked in communications. There are those whose work as community activists was greatly enhanced. And there are other stories; Willy spoke of how his experience with TAFOS gave him a vital outlet that as a youth diverted him from pursuing other more violent routes, such as his frustration as a young man growing up in Peru's 'lost decade' (Stern et al 2005). Gloria, who is now a mother and housewife, spoke of how her TAFOS experience had shaped how she had raised her children. Raul highlighted how the network of friends that he had made at TAFOS had seen him through some of the hardest moments of his life. Susana described how photography made her more active, how it sent her out onto the streets and pushed her to engage with the world around her.

Nearly everyone I interviewed described how TAFOS had made an enduring impact on their lives but in ways that would not be easily captured in traditional modes of impact assessment. They spoke about how TAFOS had touched different parts of their lives: their careers, parenting, political outlook, their community engagement and spirituality. They all suggest that TAFOS had influenced their way of thinking, engendering in them a critical outlook and crystallising a sense of social justice and purpose. Willy describes how photography allowed him to 'theorise'; Justo explained how it had helped him 'understand things he did not understand' and had 're-enforced his principles'. While Susana talked about it as a 'lifestyle', a critical and engaged way of looking at the world, that

has stayed with her forever. Much of what they describe evokes Pablo Freire's notion of critical consciousness which describes a process by which an individual becomes conscious of their reality and then tries to change it (1970). However the way this manifest itself for people was very different as each participant's experience was rooted in their own personal history and circumstances.

The interviews also revealed limitations around the sustainability of impact. Maria didn't have a camera and could not carry on using photography in her community work. German says the reality of having to earn a living meant he had to prioritise other things. He spoke of the TAFOS experience with great warmth but life had 'absorbed' him. This research interviewed 10 out of 270 and does not assume that the reported experiences of enduring impact were felt by all participants. Existing research into participatory photography establishes a direct relationship between the quality of participation experienced, project durations and project outcomes and demonstrates that projects involving high levels of 'empowerment' resulted in some participants becoming 'agents of change' (Catalani & Minkler 2010). These Photos Were My Life demonstrates that the participants interviewed, who had been active members of TAFOS over a period of years, continue to feel the benefits of their experience many years after the project end however it is important not to presume that this applies to all who were involved in TAFOS. Thomas Muller, TAFOS's founder was unconvinced about the long-term impact and relevance for many participants.

A campesino is not a photography aficionado. If it is no longer useful to them

then they will stop using it. It is a simple thing. At the time of TAFOS it was very useful – to explain, to transmit, to be listened to and so that they could listen. But when the moment passed they put the camera down.’ (T.Müller, TAFOS founder 2011, inter- view, 3rd June).

With this caveat, this ‘follow-up’ study (McLeod & Thompson 2009) into TAFOS’s impact demonstrates that evidence of the enduring long-term significance of participatory arts and media projects on people’s lives exists. However, to effectively capture and communicate it we need to expand our notion of what counts as impact and the criteria and indicators we use to demonstrate it. These former TAFOS participants assign the experience as having had significant long-term influence in their lives but not necessarily in ways that are easily measurable beyond their accounts. Impact is not always observable in quantifiable units; it is not always objective or conscious, but does that make it any less relevant?

In my own research, the Korsakow³, non-linear film format allowed for the communication of these diverse experiences and for them to be presented together without the imposition of a definitive narrative that simplified the enduring long-term influence of TAFOS on its participants. Its multi-vocality meant that context and complexity do not get stripped away. The different stories illuminate on the question of long-term significance while also revealing how the intricate interplay of political and social conditions

and context, subjective and individual agency and the experience of their participation in TAFOS all feeds into and shapes the legacy of these projects.

This research contributes to a wider push that seeks to re-imagine how we define, capture and attribute the value of socially engaged, participatory arts and media (Bishop 2012, Shaw 2012, Kester 1997). This shift requires that we move beyond mechanistic, qualitative approaches based on linear theories of change and grapple with complexity, context and outcomes as they emerge and are embodied through practice. It encourages us to think about impact not in definitive terms with the objective of producing concrete evidence but rather as an exploration of subjective lived experience in context and over time. In this way we connect narratives around individual impact to a wider complex politics of voice, community and social change.

Evaluation can be a frustrating experience for resource and time poor practitioners. It can feel more like a ticking boxes exercise for generating feel-good narratives to satisfy and secure funding rather than an opportunity to engage in critical thinking and learning. Longitudinal research is not always possible but building up a picture of impact over time, documenting the experience of projects and participants over the course of years and re-visiting initiatives can provide an invaluable insight into the dynamics and value of participatory arts. It adds an important dimension to debates around their social impact and potential contribution to social change. It is a layer to the case for the impact of participatory arts that often goes untold.

³Korsakow is a software for creating browser-based dynamic documentaries. It allows users to create and interact with non-linear or database-driven narratives: <http://korsakow.com/>

References

- Belfiore, E. & Bennett, O., 2007. Determinants of Impact: Towards a Better Understanding of Encounters with the Arts. *Cultural Trends*, 16(3), pp.225–275.
- Belfiore, E., 2002. Art as a means of alleviating social exclusion: Does it really work? A critique of instrumental cultural policies and social impact studies in the UK. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 8(1), pp.91–106.
- Bishop, C., 2012. *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, Verso.
- Catalani, C. & Minkler, M., 2010. Photovoice: A Review of the Literature in Health and Public Health. *Health Education & Behavior*, 37(3), pp.424–451.
- Fairey, Tiffany., 2015a. Whose Pictures Are These? Re-framing the promise of participatory photography. Goldsmiths, University of London. Available at:
https://www.academia.edu/18521741/Whose_Pictures_Are_These_Reframing_the_promise_of_participatory_photography
- Fairey, Tiffany. 2015b. *These Photos Were My Life*. Digital Korsakow film.
<http://tiffanyfairey.co.uk/#/these-photos-were-my-life/>
- Fairey, Tiffany. 2017. "These Photos Were My Life: Understanding the Impact of Participatory Photography Projects." *Community Development Journal* 1 (19). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsx010>.
- Freire, Paulo. 1973. *Education for Critical Consciousness*. New York: Seabury Press.
- Kester, Grant. 1995. "Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art." *Afterimage* 22: 5–11.
- Jermyn, Helen. 2004. "The Art of Inclusion." 35. Arts Council England.
- Matarosso, F. 1997. "Use Or Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts." London: Comedia.
- McLeod, Julie & Thomson, Rachel. 2009. *Researching Social Change: Qualitative Approaches*. Sage Publications Ltd.
- Merli, P., 2002. Evaluating the social impact of participation in arts activities. *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, 8(1), p.107.
- Reeves, Michelle. 2002. "Measuring the Economic and the Social Impact of the Arts." 24. The Arts Council of England.
- Shaw, J., 2012. Beyond Empowerment Inspiration: Interrogating the Gap between the Ideals and Practice Reality of Participatory Video, in: In E.J. Milne, C. Mitchell and N. de Lange (Eds) *Handbook of Participatory Video*. Altamira Press.
- Starn, Orin, Carlos Ivan Degregori, and Robin Kirk, eds. 2005. *The Peru Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- TAFOS. 2006. *Pais de Luz. Talleres de Fotografia Social, TAFOS. Perú 1986-1998*. Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú.